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THE FIRST GENERAL ASSEMBLY OF THE PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH IN THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA.

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THE FIRST GENERAL ASSEMBLY.

OUR indebtedness to the past is at all times a profitable subject of study, and the approach of the one hundredth year of the life of our Church as, so to say, a national organization, almost requires us to bring as vividly as possible before us the men who organized and the men who attended the First General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church in the United States. The story of this First General Assembly, if only I could tell it adequately, would be full of instruction and interest; and I am not without hope that even the account which I bring to-night, necessarily prepared in haste and amid many interruptions, will induce those whom I have the honor to address seriously to study this fruitful period of our Church's history.

The Presbyterian Church in this country owes the beginning of its ecclesiastical organization not only to the missionary zeal and administrative ability of Francis Makemie, but also to the generosity of the "Union of Congregational and Presbyterian Ministers of London." A Presbytery composed of seven ministers was formed either in the autumn of 1705 or in the spring of 1706. Its only official designation was "The Presbytery;"* but, because it was often

* "It is a noteworthy fact that this original Presbytery is nowhere given a local name, either in its records or by its members. It is simply called 'a Presbytery' or 'The Presbytery'—the supreme judicatory of organized Presbyterianism in the country. We first find the name 'Presbytery of

convenient and sometimes necessary in conversation, in correspondence and in the records of foreign ecclesiastical bodies to add to its official designation a geographical name, it soon came to be known as "The Presbytery of Philadelphia."* The name of the Presbytery does not reveal the location of its clerical members. They were scattered along the coast from New Jersey to Virginia. It is not worth our while, at this time, to discuss the completeness of its organization, whether it approached more nearly the stricter Presbytery of Scotland or that Union in London to which it was specially indebted for its existence. In all probability it was not like either, just as the America of that day was like neither England nor Scotland. I have no doubt that its "historic episcopate," to quote the words of a current document likely to become famous, was "locally adapted, in the methods of its administration," to the needs of a new country and a large missionary field.

The Presbytery by no means included all the Presbyterianism then in the country. The Dutch of New York and New Jersey were as thoroughly Presbyterian as were the men from Ulster. Many of the Germans just then beginning to come in large numbers to our shores were as Calvinistic in doctrine and discipline as the Dutch; while not a few of the Puritans of Massachusetts and Connecticut believed at least in the scriptural origin of the office of ruling elder; and

Philadelphia' given to one of the subordinate Presbyteries into which this original Presbytery was, by its own act, divided when it, the mother of all our Presbyteries, assumed the name of Synod—not 'The Synod of Philadelphia,' but simply 'The Synod.'"—W. M. RICE, D. D.

* Thus, as Dr. Charles A. Briggs—to whom for the recovery of invaluable materials of American Presbyterian history the Church owes a debt not adequately recognized nor easily discharged—shows, the Synod of Ulster in June, 1713, Sess. 3, used the title "The Presbytery of Philadelphia."—*Amer. Presbyterianism*, note, p. 167.

"Congregational Presbyteries" or church Sessions were by no means uncommon among them. If the Presbytery did not at first include all the Presbyterian elements in the Colonies, it soon began to assimilate many of them. Only ten years after the organization of the Presbytery of Philadelphia (so rapidly had the Church increased in strength) the Presbytery transformed itself into a Synod, and constituted three Presbyteries, or four if we include the Presbytery of Long Island. Thus in 1716 the Presbytery became the Synod of Philadelphia, and the Synod was convened for the first time in September of the following year.

There was good ground for the change, for the number of ministers and churches in 1716 was double the number belonging to the Presbytery in 1706. The growth of the Church, after the formation of the Synod and up to the schism, was even more rapid than before. There were additions to the ministry and to the laity from Congregational New England and from the French, the Dutch and the German Presbyterians. But by far the greatest accession was due to the immigration from the North of Ireland. The death of William and the accession of Anne gave to the High Church party increased power. They had been able to defeat William's favorite policy of comprehending under one establishment the different forms of Protestantism that prevailed in the three kingdoms. But they were not able to thwart the policy of toleration adopted by the king when the impossibility of comprehension became clear. The Act of Toleration, passed in the first year of his reign, was all that William was able to secure for those nonconformists of Ireland and England whose loyalty to his claims gave stability to his throne; and though it was in fact, as it was regarded by them, a great relief, it was but scant justice at the best.

So long as William lived the Act of Toleration was faithfully executed, and the policy of toleration was

not changed. But after the accession of Anne the execution of the act in favor of the dissenters was tardy and unequal, and measures began to be taken by the High Church party for its amendment. Such an amendment was secured in the sacramental "Test Act," by which conscientious Presbyterians were effectively driven or excluded from all public positions of honor and trust. And there were other methods of persecution. "No sooner," writes Dr. Blackwood, "had Anne ascended the throne than the same intolerant High Church party that had formerly oppressed them renewed their assaults. At one time the annoyances of the Presbyterians of Ulster arose from embarrassments about marriages. At another time they were assailed because their ministers obeyed their Presbyteries by preaching in vacant churches; while the most absurd charges of disloyalty were urged against them in pamphlets, and often made the subject of legal investigation before the magistrates." At last, in 1714, an act was passed to prevent the growth of schism, by which, under penalty of three months' imprisonment and disqualification as a teacher, every teacher of children was forbidden "to be willingly present at any conventicle of dissenters for religious worship." The fifth year of the reign of the First George is marked by the passage of an act which gave back legal toleration to the Presbyterians of Ireland. But the relief came too late, and its effect was only to substitute the oppression of the wealthy landowner for the oppression of the officer of the Crown.

To escape this oppression the Ulster Presbyterians sailed in large numbers for America. Their advent proved a benediction to the Colonies as great as the earlier immigration of the English Puritans. No men did more than the men from Ulster to secure the independence of the American States. No men did better work in the political organization of the States and the Federal Union. None surpassed them in love

of learning and in the strength of their determination to be free. Their blood was the blood of the most persistent nationality in Europe. Nearly three centuries have justified the boast of King James, uttered when they passed from Scotland to the Ulster Plantations, that here at least was a people, unlike the English of the Pale, too vigorous to be absorbed or modified by the Irish Celts. Their life in their second home, severe as it was, was a providential preparation for their mission in the New World. As Mr. Bancroft has well said of them, "Their training in Ireland had kept the spirit of liberty and the readiness to resist unjust government as fresh in their hearts as though they had just been listening to the preachings of Knox or musing over the political creed of the Westminster Assembly."

When in the eighteenth century the movement from Ulster to America had fairly begun, it increased in volume annually until the beginning of the difficulties between the American Colonies and the mother country. The emigration had commenced as early as the seventeenth century, during the persecutions of the Stuarts. But it was in the reigns of Anne and George the First that it began so greatly to enlarge, and to increase the number of the congregations of the Synod of Philadelphia. "Year after year," we are told, "from the second quarter of the eighteenth century, it is estimated that twelve thousand people annually sailed for America from the North of Ireland. Such was the drain, indeed, that it was computed that in 1773 and the five preceding years the North of Ireland lost by emigration to America one-fourth of the trading caste and a like proportion of the manufacturing people."

During the first half of the eighteenth century these accessions to the ministers and congregations from Ulster led to differences within the Synod. In 1741 these differences of opinion produced a schism, which con-

tinued until 1758, when, by the union formed between the two Synods of Philadelphia and New York, the Synod of New York and Philadelphia was constituted. This happy union brought together in the same judicatory the Presbyterian from New England and the Presbyterian from Ulster, and the Church grew rapidly in numbers and influence until the American Revolution. During the war for Independence the growth of the Church was, of course, less rapid. But at its close, and on the adoption by the Colonies of the Constitution of the United States, the Synod was ready and anxious to reorganize its ecclesiastical courts, and in that way to adjust itself to the new civil government which its ministers had done so much to make possible. This it did by taking measures to organize a General Assembly.

The first action of the Synod looking toward the formation of the higher body was passed in 1784. Attempts were made in that year to bring the Synod into close association, and, if possible, into an ecclesiastical union, with the Dutch and German Presbyterians. But so far as an ecclesiastical union was concerned they were not successful. Meanwhile, the Synod did not intermit its endeavors to secure an organization adjusted to the new Union which the now independent Colonies had formed. In 1788 it determined on the organization of four Synods—New York and New Jersey, Philadelphia, Virginia, and the Carolinas—and in the place of the old Synod it constituted a General Assembly. This General Assembly, representing the entire Church, was given a written constitution, the Confession of the Westminster Assembly and its Form of Government and Discipline; of which the former had been accepted by the Adopting Act of 1729, twelve years before the calamitous schism. Having thus reorganized the Synod and adjusted the ecclesiastical assemblies to the new conditions wrought by the War of Independence, the Synod resolved

"that the first meeting of the General Assembly to be constituted out of the above-said four Synods be held on the third Thursday of May, one thousand seven hundred and eighty-nine, in the Second Presbyterian Church in the city of Philadelphia, at eleven o'clock in the morning; and that Dr. Witherspoon, or, in his absence Dr. Rodgers, open the General Assembly with a sermon and preside until a Moderator be chosen."

Such, briefly recited, are the steps in the organization of the Presbyterian Church from the formation of the first Presbytery to the formation of the General Assembly. The period intervening between the two events was eighty-three years. Two generations had passed away since Makemie and his copresbyters constituted the Presbytery of Philadelphia. Already, the American Presbyterian Church was rich in traditions. Already it had an honorable history. Events had occurred during this period of nearly a century, and earlier events had occurred, both in the New World and in the Fatherlands, which together made the American Presbyterian minister of the period of the First General Assembly a strongly marked man. And we cannot bring adequately before us the General Assembly of 1789 unless, in some way, we acquaint ourselves with the typical Presbyterian minister of the time.

We shall do the Presbyterian ministers of that day no more than justice, and we shall do them no slight honor, in asserting, as the most obvious element of their clerical character, their implicit faith in the Bible as the word of God and as the infallible rule of belief and practice. Of course in this they are not so much to be contrasted as to be associated with the ministry of the other churches of the Reformation. In common with them all, they accepted the aphorism of Chillingworth: "The Bible, and the Bible only, is the religion of Protestants." And yet, if I am not mistaken, there

were an energy and a thoroughness in their acceptance of the Bible as the word of God which did not characterize its acceptance by either the Lutheran or the Anglican communion. Already there had appeared in Lutheranism the subjective tendency, inherited from Luther himself, which at a later day elevated the Christian consciousness to a place beside the Scriptures as the rule of faith. And as for Anglicanism, the emphasis which it placed upon the Church was almost as strong as that which it placed upon the written word. In contrast with these types of Protestantism, the Puritan Protestantism, both of England and of Scotland and Ulster, rested solely on the inspired and written word of God. This was its noblest trait. Indeed, if a single criticism of it at the period of which I am speaking may be allowed in a lecture purely historical, I should say, that the scriptural Protestantism of our fathers was disposed rather to undervalue those *a priori* elements of religious truth which the Scriptures themselves so evidently presuppose.

As their creed was distinctly scriptural, it was also —and I may add for that reason—systematic; or, to employ a term quite popular now-a-days, it was scholastic. Those who are accustomed to place the adjective scriptural in antithesis to the adjective scholastic, who set "School Divinity" over against "Biblical Theology," must hide from themselves the facts that the Reformer John Calvin was at once the greatest exegete and the greatest systematic theologian among the Reformers; and that Richard Baxter, whom they praise because, among the Puritan divines, he is pervaded most thoroughly with the biblical spirit, was, after all, the most scholastic of the Puritans, the greatest student of the Schoolmen, and the warmest admirer among all the Puritan divines, of the very distinctions in which the subtle and angelical doctors delighted to revel. Biblical Theology must become Dogmatic Theology if the Bible is, in any true sense of the

term, a single book to be interpreted. It is only when scholars regard it as a series of inconsistent documents that need cross-examination; only when they expect by cross-examination to elicit from these documents a story different from that which, in the view of the Church, lies upon the face of Scripture,—that their Biblical Theology refuses to issue in a system of doctrine contained in the Sacred Scriptures. The divines of 1789, just because they were biblical in the sense that they accepted the whole Bible as the one word of God, were inevitably doctrinal. With this unifying postulate they could no more have escaped constructing a system of theology than the student of the varied heavens, who comes to their examination with the postulate of the unifying law of attraction, can escape constructing a system of astronomy.

The theological system which they constructed, or which, having been constructed, they cordially received and adopted, was that strong, complex and profound system which in those days as in ours was designated by the name of the great Reformer who had given to it its most consistent expression. Regarded as a system, it was far older than Calvin. Its profound truths, confirmed by his own experience of the depth of sin and of the sovereignty of grace, had been wrought into the life and the writings of the greatest of the Latin Fathers. It found an expounder and martyr in the Dark Ages in Gotteschalck, whom Hincmar of Rheims was unable to bend to his stubborn will. Its central doctrine of the absolute sovereignty of God was defended by Anselm of Canterbury at the beginning, and by Thomas Aquinas at the culmination, of the scholastic age. And though it was depressed and discredited throughout the long period during which theology was enslaved by ecclesiasticism, it was rehabilitated the moment that implicit faith in the Church was exchanged for implicit faith in the written Word. Since its rehabiliation this great Cal-

vinistic system has often enjoyed the honor of criticism at many points and by many hands. But no one of its respectable critics has ever denied that its influence has been to make men strong, able both to struggle and to endure, able also to labor and organize. It is greatly to its honor that the golden ages of the system have been periods of struggle for the dignity and the rights of man, and that, while no other system so abases him before God, no other system has done so much to secure for him the blessings of civil liberty and self-government. But while it has conferred on man these political blessings, its chief glory is that it has always thoroughly educated and governed those who have accepted it, and that thus it has given to the world one of the noblest types of Christianity. To quote the language of my honored colleague, Professor Morris: "The moral sense has always responded to it decisively, if at all. If, at times, it has seemed cold and passionless, it has been able to enter into multitudes of human hearts, and has caused them to respond in notes as sweet and deep as those of angels are. Above all, it has entered most vitally into the characters of those who have received it, elevating their purposes while it enlarged their conceptions, strengthening their manhood as well as their reason, and so certifying itself in much of the best Christian experience and activity historically recorded."

Besides this biblical belief and Calvinistic theology, there were other influences which contributed to form the Presbyterian minister of 1789, far more distinctive if not more profound. Whether he traced his ancestry to France, to Holland or to Britain, the Presbyterian of 1789 had been thoroughly informed of the story of the persecution of his fathers by prelacy, by papacy and by monarchy; and his thorough knowledge of this painful history strongly attached him to the distinctive polity of his Church. It would add strength and in-

telligence to our own attachment to Presbyterianism if we were to secure a knowledge of the persecution of the fathers as accurate and as detailed as that possessed by the members of the First General Assembly. It made them vigorous Presbyterians. Nor did they spare to oppose with vigor the introduction of diocesan bishops into the country before the Revolutionary War had it made it certain that they would be the rulers of their own sect alone. Let this opposition be clearly understood. The members of the Synod which organized the First General Assembly were in favor of the widest ecclesiastical liberty. They changed the sections of the Westminster Confession which, in their amended form, recognize the civil magistrates as only nursing fathers of the Church, and by expunging that phrase from the Catechism they denied that "to tolerate a false religion" was a sin forbidden in the second commandment. But so jealous were they of Presbyterianism that they seized every occasion offered them to reaffirm and defend it as scriptural; and so long as the Colonies were bound by ties of civil government to England, fearing the beginnings of a religious establishment they resisted the residence of a prelate on American soil. I shall have occasion later to speak of the Rev. John Rodgers, who, next to John Witherspoon, was the most notable figure in the First Assembly. Year after year Dr. Rodgers represented our infant Church in the organized opposition of Presbyterians and Congregationalists to the ordination of an Anglican bishop for the Colonies. And though it cannot be doubted that England would have been glad to compromise on a basis like that of Archbishop Usher's "Reduction of Episcopacy to Synodical Government," he and his colleagues were very far from believing that they were bound by anything in Presbyterian history to accept or even to listen to such a proposal.

This strong attachment of the Presbyterians of 1789

to the Bible, to Calvinism and to the Presbyterian polity was strengthened, and at the same time modified, by the memory of the great schism which had been healed only thirty years before. I should go beyond my time if I were to set forth the causes of the division of 1741 or to narrate its incidents. Old Side and New Side, in the excitement of controversy, emphasized and even exaggerated their differences. The growth of the Colonies was so rapid that even during the division both Synods could not fail to increase. But the increment of the Church during the separation we cannot but believe was far less than it would have been had Presbyterianism been united. So, at any rate, it seemed to the fathers; and, unless I misinterpret the history of the Church after the reunion of 1758, their affection for Presbyterianism after that date, while not less strong than before, was called forth specifically by its deeper truths and by the broader features common to all the Presbyterian churches of Europe, rather than by the peculiarities of the Presbyterianism of any single country. That I am correct in this supposition would seem to be proved by several striking facts. One of these is the touching, irenic and even pleading letter written by the Synod of 1788 to the half Congregational Presbytery of Suffolk on Long Island. Another is the strenuous endeavor of the Synod to comprehend in a single organization the Dutch, the German and the British Presbyterians of the country. And still another is the fact that a considerable party in the Synod—a party to which so strong a Presbyterian as Ashbel Green belonged—desired to add to the Directory for Worship a number of forms of prayer—a characteristic of Continental rather than of British Presbyterianism. It is clear, I think, upon the face of the history, that the ministers of the Presbyterian Church who reorganized the General Assembly were anxious to preserve rather the common features of historic Presbyterianism than

the peculiarities—much as they may have loved them—derived from any special country. They had learned what they thought the evil of emphasizing peculiarities from the schism, and they had learned the possibility of a wide Presbyterian union from the political union of the Colonies, which had just then been fully accomplished. In other words, the spirit of Presbyterian union which prevailed in America in 1867 and 1868, and secured the union of 1869, whose happy fruits we are enjoying to-day, prevailed in the Synod to which we are indebted for the First General Assembly.

If the conviction of weakness resulting from the schism led the Presbyterians of 1739 to emphasize the larger and more fundamental elements of their polity, so did the Synodical Union which terminated the schism; and for this reason—namely, that the Union brought together in the same organization Calvinists and Presbyterians springing from different nationalities. There was little difference between the Calvinism of the Old Side and the Calvinism of the New Side Presbyterians. Both sides were thoroughgoing in their acceptance of the theology of the Reformed churches. They were not only Calvinistic in the broader sense of that term, but they accepted the mode of Calvinism known as the theology of the Covenants; and the acceptance of it by one party was no less cordial than its acceptance by the other. But when the rending occurred, the party of the New Side found favor with the brethren in New York and Long Island, and, uniting with them, founded the Synod of New York. In this New Side Synod of New York there was not only a large New England element, but the New England element gave to the Synod its distinctive character. So true is this, that the first three Presidents of the College of the New Side at Princeton, all elected during the period of the division—namely, Jonathan Dickinson, Aaron Burr and Jonathan Edwards—were natives of New England and graduates

of the college at New Haven. Meanwhile, the Synod of Philadelphia during the same period became more and more Scoto-Irish. Thus it happened that when, in 1758, the schism was healed by the reunion, there was a union of elements as distinct as those of New England and those of the North of Ireland. The attempt to form such a union might well have excited apprehension. But in 1789 it had existed happily and usefully for thirty years. The two elements were perfectly blended. Each side contributed to the united Synod special traits of which the other side recognized the value. Meanwhile, individual German and Dutch and French Presbyterian ministers had joined the united body. There is good reason to believe, therefore, that when the General Assembly was organized the typical Presbyterian minister had derived, from the union in the Church of different national elements, a distinctively American character, and, so far forth, was a somewhat different man from both the minister of Scottish Ulster and the minister of English New England.

The growth of this distinctly union spirit—so important to the minister of 1789 in view of the work immediately before him, the work of organizing a Continental Church for a new nation,—the growth of this distinctly union spirit was still further fostered by the influence of the great Evangelical Revival, the blessings of which had been showered on both the New England and the Scoto-Irish Presbyterian congregations. If the history of the great Evangelical Revival of the eighteenth century has yet been adequately written, it has not been my fortune to meet with the volumes that contain it. Perhaps no adequate history has yet been written, because we are still under its direct influence and are still enjoying its immediate fruits. When the historian of the twenty-first century shall explore earlier church history in order to find a religious movement as profound, as widespread and as

blessed in its influence, it will not be strange if he shall hesitate to say that even the Reformation of the sixteenth century was a greater religious revolution. For this great Revival there had been adequate historical preparations. The spirit that appeared in the *Collegia Pietatis* of Spener reappeared in the Moravian village of Herrnhutt, and was caught by the Wesleys, who themselves had been prepared for it by the studies and prayers and labors of the Holy Club at Oxford. Suddenly as the refreshing shower of summer falls upon an arid land the rain of heavenly influence descended upon England and Scotland, which had been made almost deserts by the Deism and Moderatism that pervaded even the churches of the two countries. Against this infidelity Apologetical literature had waged a noble warfare almost in vain. Of course the great Boyle Lectures of Richard Bentley and of Samuel Clarke and the great *Analogy* of Joseph Butler had reinvigorated the faith of the doubting and in some cases had put to flight the enemy. But the religious life of Britain was not to be revived by Apologies, however ably conceived and written. "God spake the word; and great was the company of the preachers." It was the simple, the earnest, the direct, and, let us add, sometimes the extravagant, preaching of the gospel which, under God, wrought the new religious revolution. Apart from the distinctly religious benefits it conferred, its influence on the political life of the English-speaking peoples can scarcely be exaggerated. If one were asked to name the greatest single cause of the difference between the peaceful passage of England and the stormy passage of France from the era of dynastic wars to the present era of the rights of man; if one were asked, "What is the great reason that in England freedom has peacefully broadened down from precedent to precedent, while France has attained, if she has attained, civil liberty only through bloody revolutions?" he could give only one true

answer; and that is, that England was under the power of the Evangelical Revival which inculcated human duties, while France was under the spell of that Deism which asserted only human rights.

Almost simultaneously a religious movement as persuasive and as profound began in the Colonies. In spirit and in method it was one with the revival in the mother-country. Great preachers and earnest preaching marked the revival. The sermons of Edwards in New England, of the Tennents in the Middle Colonies, and of Davies in Virginia remain to us, and serve to show the type of preaching common at the time. The revival is entitled to be called great, not only because of the widespread interest in religion that attended it, but also because of its continuance. Some of its methods were blameworthy, and some of its evils were serious indeed. The more ardent spirits, like George Whitefield and Gilbert Tennent, permitted themselves to judge their brethren with a severity which justified the deep repentance of their later years. But the incidental evils of the revival were spots upon the sun. It radiated everywhere the warmth and light which the churches needed for their vigorous life. The Old Side fought against its methods, but they caught its spirit; and thus, as I have intimated, all enjoyed its blessed fruits. As time went on the bitterness of the schism was allayed and the schism itself was healed. A spirit of union succeeded to the spirit of controversy: and this spirit of union, caught from a profounder sense of sin and a deeper spiritual life, the Presbyterian minister of 1788 inherited from his immediate predecessors. Thus by means of a great spiritual experience the men who organized the first General Assembly lost their colonial or provincial or separating traits, and became, if I may so say, union, continental and catholic Presbyterians.

But political as well as religious events aided in the destruction of provincialism among the Presbyterian

ministry of the times and in promoting the distinct spirit I am endeavoring to describe. The year that witnessed the gathering in Philadelphia of the First General Assembly witnessed the gathering in New York of the first Congress under the Constitution. How much the Presbyterian ministry of the country had done and endured to make that Congress a possibility I cannot stop to show you. I need only say that while the Quakers were non-combatants, and hence were at least inactive; while Episcopalians as a rule, and not unnaturally, were against the Colonies and in favor of the Crown; while the Methodists followed the mother Church, and imitated John Wesley himself in their denunciations of the revolting Americans,—the Congregational ministers of New England and the Presbyterian ministers from Long Island to Georgia gave to the cause of the Colonies all that they could give of the sanction of religion. The Presbyterian ministers upheld it in the pulpit and in the press, by prayers and sermons and tracts, with vigor and with unanimity. I have examined all the biographies I could find, in Dr. Sprague's invaluable *Annals* and in other works, of the Presbyterian ministers of this time, for the purpose of ascertaining the character and amount of aid they gave to the Colonies during the War of Independence. I began my examination with the apprehension that the indebtedness of the new Union to these ministers had possibly been somewhat exaggerated by later orators. But I closed it with the conviction that it would be hard, indeed, to exaggerate it, and that Dr. Inglis, the Tory rector of Trinity Church, New York, was simply describing the whole Presbyterian body, and doing them only justice, when he wrote in October, 1776: "I do not know one Presbyterian minister, nor have I been able, after strict inquiry, to hear of any, who did not by preaching and every effort in his power promote all the measures of the Colonial Congress, however extravagant." And,

as they aided the Colonies in the war, so they contributed, by their sincere and earnestly expressed sympathy at least, to the formation of the more perfect and perpetual Union under the Constitution. The truth is, that the action of the various Synods which resulted in the formation of a national General Assembly under the constitution of the Church was the product of the very spirit that governed the Constitutional Convention of the Colonies, which met in the same city during the same period. The Presbyterian minister of 1789 brought this national spirit into the councils of the Church. During these formative years it dominated, and even depressed, his local and ancestral pride, and united with the other causes I have already named to make him larger and more catholic, while no less deeply attached than at an earlier day to his Calvinism and Presbyterianism.

Two more formative influences ought to be mentioned, in order to enable us to understand the type of minister that gave character to the ecclesiastical assemblies of the day. I have time only to mention them. The ministry of the Presbyterian Church was a liberally educated ministry. The preachers of the period had been disciplined and cultivated by the course in the humanities. Indeed, one cause of the schism was the fear felt by the Old Side that if the Tennents should be given their way unlearned ministers would wrest the Scriptures to the destruction of the churches. And as for the New Side, scarcely had the Presbyterians of New Brunswick been united to the Synod of New York than they made their first care the establishment and endowment of the College of New Jersey. By 1789 a ministry had grown up that had been well educated in the New England or the Presbyterian colleges. When I remind myself of the decline in the employment of the Latin language, I think it not too much to say that they could read their diplomas with far more ease than can the aver-

age Bachelor of to-day. I shall not dwell on this trait, for it was scarcely a peculiarity. They simply honored the traditions of their class, and transmitted them to us. But I speak of it because it is good for us to remember that they brought to the consideration of the subjects which the new conditions of the Church placed before them intellectual faculties not less cultivated and disciplined, to say the least, than those employed in the political Convention that framed the Constitution of the United States.

The other influence to which I have referred was the character of their work. All of them were ministers in a new country; all, save a few who had pulpits in Philadelphia and New York and three or four other towns, were missionaries; and all of them were laboring at a critical and formative time. This fact tended to make them thoughtful men, for it compelled them to contemplate the future and to act upon their own vision of the future rather than upon precedent. I am a native of Pennsylvania, and am interested in its political history. I have often heard gentlemen of the bar of that great Commonwealth lamenting the decline of their profession. I have often heard the wish expressed, in connection with eulogies of jurists and judges like Tilghman and Rawle and Gibson and Sergeant and Rogers, that they might reappear, and the fear expressed that "we shall not look upon their like again." Now, I do not believe that greatness abandoned the legal profession in Pennsylvania at the death of these honored men. And yet the glowing eulogies pronounced upon them are not born solely of a reverence for the past. Those great men owe their renown largely to the fact that they lived during the formative period of the law of the Commonwealth. In their arguments and decisions they made the precedents to which later lawyers are accustomed to appeal and which later judges are accustomed to follow. Instead of building on other men's foundations, they laid the

foundations for their successors. This kind of work, when done well, enlarges the men who engage in it; and this, I have no doubt, is the great reason that the jurists I have named are so often spoken of as exceptionally great lawyers. And what is true of them is true also of the Presbyterian ministers in America during the last quarter of the eighteenth century. The times in which their lot was cast compelled them to engage in a great formative work; and because they were equal to it the work reacted on them and made them all, if not great men, at least men of a great type.

I have dwelt so long on these separate influences and their relations to the character of the ministers of our Church not to introduce my subject, but as the most important part of its treatment. The character of a legislative body is due, of course, to the character of the men who compose it; and it is oftenest true that, whatever the individual differences within the body, their common environment so influences them all as to put all the individuals into a single class, and so to create a type. And what I am now insisting on is that the type in the present case is no small or ignoble type. The typical Presbyterian minister of that day, the minister who sat in the First General Assembly, was a man of large and well-trained intellect; strong in his convictions of the truth of the word of God and of a great system of theology; deeply attached to his church order; fervid in his religious life, yet catholic; strengthened by missionary labor; hopeful, and with a large outlook upon a continent free and independent and to be won for Christ.

The General Assembly was ordered to meet in the city of Philadelphia, in the Second Presbyterian Church, on the third Thursday of May. Philadelphia, then as now, was the Presbyterian metropolis of the country, though relatively to the population Presbyterianism was weaker in the Philadelphia of 1789 than it is in the Philadelphia of 1887. But it

was stronger in Philadelphia than it was in New York, if we omit from our calculation the Dutch Presbyterians of the latter city. This fact, and the fact that there the first Presbytery had been organized, made Philadelphia the one appropriate place for the meeting. That the Church held and continued to hold this opinion is evident from the fact that out of the fifty meetings of the Assembly which took place before the division in 1838, forty-five were held in the same city.

When the First Assembly was convened, Philadelphia was the most considerable city in the Colonies. It comprised about forty thousand people. It was a more important port of entry than either Boston or New York. Already, between Vine and South streets the river-front was lined with wharves, and merchantmen were daily loading or discharging cargoes at every wharf. The business of the city was transacted near the river-side, and the dwellings did not reach far beyond Fourth, or at most Fifth, street to the west. Until "they were dispersed, in the year 1793 from the river-side by the fears of the yellow fever, many of the great merchants dwelt under the same roofs with their stores in Water and in Front streets." The city had been thoroughly English in its feelings before the Revolution. As late as 1752, so Dr. Franklin tells us, the people were devotedly attached to Great Britain. But from the beginning of the difficulties Philadelphia was true to the cause of the Colonies, and its devotion was deepened by the fact that it became the capital of the government and the theatre of the great political debates. It was a city of comfort and of hospitable and cheerful home-life then, as it is to-day, and Pennsylvanians, at least, were accustomed to boast of it a good deal, and often at the expense of its rival at the mouth of the Hudson. When the General Assembly met there were three Presbyterian churches in the city and one or two missionary centres—one certainly in the Northern Liberties. The First Church stood on

High street, the Second near the corner of Third and Arch streets, and the Third Church at Pine and Fourth streets. The Assembly met in the Second Church.

The congregation of the Second Church had been gathered and organized during the great revival period. Its founder was George Whitefield. It was founded in the year of the schism. During the separation it represented in Philadelphia the New Side, as the First Presbyterian Church represented the Old Side. Gilbert Tennent, the leader of the revolting Presbytery of New Brunswick, was its pastor during the division and until 1765. From 1741 to 1758, therefore, the First and Second churches belonged to different ecclesiastical bodies, but they seem to have lived side by side without strife, if not in positive amity. This was due, in no slight degree, to "the growing saintliness" of Gilbert Tennent himself. He had been a terrible controversialist in the years just preceding the schism, and he had not hesitated, as Whitefield had not, to charge many of his brethren who disliked some of the revival methods with an utter lack of vital piety. But the responsibilities of a large pastorate sobered him. "He seems," writes Dr. Sprague, "to have learned wisdom by his previous experience, for he never afterward manifested anything of the controversial spirit, but lived in much harmony with the brethren." The church prospered greatly during his ministry and during the ministry of his successors, and its large brick house of worship at the time of the First General Assembly could scarcely accommodate its ordinary congregation. Springing into life at the time of the revival and sympathizing with its methods, its earnest exhortations and its hymns, you will not be surprised to learn that it was one of the first of the Presbyterian churches to exchange the accepted version of the Psalms for Dr. Watts's imitations. And this change having been made, it soon advanced upon it by permitting the choir to sing an anthem. Its radicalism,

however, was not without a dash of conservatism, for the choir were forbidden to sing the anthem until the church services were definitely ended. Presbyterian houses of worship were among the inanimate objects that excited the special enmity of the king's soldiers during the Revolutionary War, and the Second Church of Philadelphia had suffered from this cause during the occupation of the city by the British in 1777. Its plain, rough-cast exterior—for by 1789 it had lost its one adornment, a wooden steeple—gave to it the appearance of a Friends' meeting-house. Its audience-room was a plain rectangular apartment. The pulpit, as was then the custom, stood at the side, not at the end, of the church. The congregation at this time were enjoying the services of two pastors—the Rev. Dr. James Sproat, who had been the pastor for twenty years, and whose age and ill-health had not long before compelled him to ask for relief from a part of his duties; and the Rev. Ashbel Green, who for two years had been the junior pastor.

In this church the Assembly met, according to appointment, on the third Thursday of May, 1789. Thirty-four Commissioners represented the Presbyteries of the Church. Of these, twenty-three were ministers and eleven were ruling elders. The Church thus represented had less than two hundred ministers and about four hundred churches. The Presbyteries, as a rule, had sent to the General Assembly able and exceptionally prominent men as their clerical delegates. Out of the twenty-three ministers, Dr. Sprague has recorded in his *Annals* the biographies of fourteen, and all that I have been able to ascertain concerning the others justifies the statement that, judged by their standing in the Church of which they were ministers, the Presbyterian Church of the United States has never been represented by a more distinguished body of men than those who sat in the First General Assembly.

Among them no one was so influential, either in

Church or State, as John Witherspoon, President of Nassau Hall, the minister on whom was devolved the duty of opening the Assembly with a sermon. John Witherspoon is one of those striking characters in church history who have successfully united in a single personality the statesman and the ecclesiastic. Mediæval history narrates the story of not a few men who in the attempt to unite these two careers failed in the one or the other, or in both. Even the greatest Pope of the Middle Ages, whom I take to have been Innocent III., though successful at first, was in this respect ultimately a failure, brilliant as his pontificate was. His political ability and his devotion to the Church equaled those of Gregory VII., and he lived in an age which enabled him to enjoy the political triumph which was denied to Gregory. But the policy which as statesman and ecclesiastic he made the policy of Rome was the worst policy that could have been adopted. No single Pope is so responsible as Innocent for the spread of heresy, for the bitterness of feeling between East and West, for the "Babylonian Captivity" and for the papal schism. A few ecclesiastics, I say, have really succeeded in uniting the two careers. Ambrose succeeded among the Latin Fathers; Anselm of Canterbury among the mediæval bishops; John Calvin and John Knox among the Reformers. But I am inclined to believe that even John Knox did not more successfully unite the two careers than, considering the times in which he lived, did his descendant, John Witherspoon. So far I know, his political vision was always clear and far-sighted; his courage was equal to that of any member of the Colonial Congress; he was alert yet calm in every political crisis; and he had the eloquence needed to commend his views to the favorable consideration of those he sought to influence. Above all, though a foreigner who had finished a career of distinction before he came to this country, he learned so rapidly the life of the Colonies

that he was as thoroughgoing and intelligent an American as any of those who sat with him in the Congress of 1776 and affixed their signatures to the great Declaration. On the other hand, he was the most distinguished clergyman of his Church. Indeed, there was living at this time no more distinguished clergyman in America. No man more carefully or more honorably fulfilled a great trust than he did as President of the College. His term as President was longer than the combined terms of his five predecessors, and it was marked by a notable increase in its endowment and influence. To his labors as its chief executive he added labors as a teacher in several departments and as a preacher of the gospel. Dr. McGill well says that "it was a philosophical justice that the only minister of any denomination who signed the Declaration of Independence was John Witherspoon;" and it may be added that a debt long due his memory was paid when his statue was placed in the Park of Philadelphia.

A man of far greater attainments than was Dr. Witherspoon, if not so great a man of affairs, was Dr. John Ewing, the pastor of the First Church of Philadelphia and Provost of the University of Pennsylvania. Unless Dr. Miller has exaggerated greatly, he was a prodigy of wide and various learning. "In mathematics and astronomy, in the Latin, Greek and Hebrew languages, in logic, metaphysics and moral philosophy, he was probably," writes Dr. Miller, "more accomplished than any other man in the United States." Dr. Miller, when making this statement, was writing of a man he knew well—his instructor, his friend and a connection by marriage. To his learning he added great ability as a preacher and fine social gifts. Few learned men from the Colonies deserved or received a heartier welcome in England than he did during a begging tour for Newark Academy. Another great teacher in the Assembly, if we may trust the recollections and impressions of his pupils, was Dr. Sam-

uel Stanhope Smith, the son-in-law of Dr. Witherspoon and professor of classics and belles-lettres at Princeton College—a man who, in the fine form of all he wrote and said was thought to have reproduced the form of the classics he loved to read and teach, and who, in virtue of his ability and piety and learning, was entitled to the position to which he was afterward elected, the presidency of Princeton College.

Among the pastors, perhaps the best known and most influential was John Rodgers of New York, whose biography by Dr. Samuel Miller ought to be read by all who wish to learn the injustices and persecutions suffered by our Church in its endeavor to establish itself in what is now the metropolis of the country. Reverend, benignant, dignified in appearance and in manner, eloquent with an eloquence born of deep and unaffected piety, laborious in the pastoral work, loving it, seeking and saving the lost, delighting in visits of consolation, disinterested and unambitious as a churchman, the character of Dr. Rodgers so impressed men that they often forgot that he was a man of noble intellectual gifts, of exceptional wisdom in counsel and exceptional energy in administrative work. But I cannot stop to characterize individuals, though Patrick Allison of Baltimore, and George Duffield of Philadelphia, and James Latta, and Alexander McWhorter, and Azel Roe, and James Armstrong, and Moses Hoge, and Robert Cooper, all deserve far more than the mention of their names.

Dr. Witherspoon opened the Assembly with a sermon from the text, "I have planted, Apollos watered; but God gave the increase." The sermon I have not been able to find. But the sermon, from the same text, preached soon after he entered upon his duties as President of the College, and preserved in Dr. Witherspoon's collected works, contains a treatment of the subject well suited to the opening of the General Assembly, and well calculated to impress upon its mem-

bers the duty of looking to God for success in the great work to which the Presbyterian Church was called. In the organization for business Dr. Rodgers of New York was elected Moderator, and Dr. Duffield of Philadelphia was chosen Clerk.

It is not my intention to dwell on the details of the business which the body considered. The records are easily accessible and will well repay perusal. The minutes make it clear that the Assembly were far more deeply solicitous for the evangelization of the country than for the details of Presbyterian order. They were not unwilling to confer in a catholic and charitable, and even yielding, spirit with brethren who thought that appeals should not go beyond the Presbyteries; but they were determined that home missionaries should be appointed to preach the gospel to the outlying districts of the Synods, and that the Scriptures should be placed in the hands of the entire population. That home missionary work which has so highly honored the Church in the later periods of its history, and in which the Church has reaped so many and such abundant harvests, excited the profoundest interest in the First Assembly; and this interest issued in action looking to its regular and effective prosecution. Impressed with the necessity of union in effort, which could be secured only by consultation in Assembly of Commissioners from the entire Church, the Assembly urged the Synods to take measures that would enable all the Presbyteries to send to the Assembly their full representation. Twenty-seven years before the American Bible Society was organized they took action looking to the publication in America of a correct edition of the English version of the Bible and to its circulation throughout the land. They declared with positiveness the right of their congregations to employ spiritual songs of human composition in the service of praise in the house of God. They congratulated the people of the country on their achievement

both of independence and of union; and, looking out beyond the limits of their own communion, they adopted measures to secure fraternal intercourse and co-operation with other churches of Christ.

The session of the Assembly was brief, only five days in length. They were troubled with no judicial cases, and their legislative acts were few. But all they did, examined in the light of the subsequent history of the Church, was wise and timely. When I tell you that they provided so far as they could for their own better organization; that they organized the missionary work of the Church; that they provided for the spread of copies of the word of God; that they dealt in a charitable and conciliatory spirit with those whose relations to independency led them to fear the General Assembly; that they were liberal in the freedom they granted to the congregations in worship; that they sought to aid in making evident the unity of the Church of Christ by affectionate intercourse with their brethren; and that they recognized, not without patriotic fervor, the civil power as ordained of God,—I am only saying, that they left untouched no great subject which could properly have come before them as a National Ecclesiastical Assembly whose system of doctrine had already been accepted; and I may be permitted to add my own belief that none of their successors have revealed a larger mind, a more catholic spirit, a wisdom more nearly equal to the problems before them, a more earnest or more intelligent ambition to fulfill the great mission assigned to them in the providence of God.

I have thus told, very inadequately, the story of the First General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church of America. Honorable as the story is, it does not yield the point of view from which we can see at their best the ministers who attended it. To attain that point of view we should have to follow them to their several fields of labor. We should have to return with Witherspoon to the College, or follow Rodgers to New

York, or accompany Moses Hoge during his long but delightful journey to the Valley of Virginia. Not in the Assembly at Philadelphia, but in their churches at home, as they "justified the ways of God to men," and besought sinners to be reconciled to God, and comforted the sorrowing, and impressed the Christian morality upon the rising communities, they did their greatest work in building up the City of God.

We cannot follow them. But, thinking of them only as members of the First Assembly of their Church, it becomes us all to recall with devout gratitude the great work they did as the Church's representatives. Our enlargement to-day is the fruit of their wise and faithful husbandry. Other men have labored and we have entered into their labors. During the coming year many of us will refresh our knowledge of their history. Well for us will it be if we shall also catch their spirit; and with our enlarged opportunities, made possible by their labors, shall rival their wisdom, their catholicity, their Christian patriotism, their piety, their devotion to the truth, their zeal for the honor of God, their love for the souls of men. We hold in trust for the next age the same Bible, the same system of doctrine, the same noble polity which they so wisely employed and transmitted to us. May God help us so to employ them that we shall be as worthy of honorable and grateful commemoration in the coming century, as they are worthy of this honorable and grateful commemoration by us, their children, to-day.

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